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Loren Munk: ‘Location, Location, Location, Mapping the New York Art World’

By **ROBERTA SMITH**

Lesley Heller Workspace

54 Orchard Street, near Grand Street, Lower East Side

Through Oct. 16

Loren Munk’s obsession with art, art history and the New York art world is evidently more than one person can handle. So Mr. Munk created James Kalm, the alter ego he assumes when he videotapes gallery openings and exhibitions and posts them, with commentary, [on his Web site](#), the Kalm Report.

More substantial expressions of his fixation are the gaudy maps that Mr. Munk has been painting for several years. Suggesting admiration for Ad Reinhardt’s cartoons and Stuart Davis’s bright, tactile, jangling forms, they chart the ebb and flow of New York museums, exhibitions, galleries and especially its artists and their studios with relentless vividness and some wit. “There are over eight million paintings in the Naked City, this is only one of them,” Mr. Monk intones across the bottom of one canvas.

Mr. Monk starts with a street map of his area of interest to which he adds little plaques of color lettered with information and connected, with a line of the same color, to the relevant point on the map. When his subjects are fairly contained, a degree of order prevails, as when he charts the studios of the founding members of the Abstract Expressionist hangout called the Club. But with larger subjects like the [East Village](#) or [SoHo art scenes](#), things get a bit wild. The plaques become crowded, the lines accumulate and the maps are nearly obliterated.

The most extreme case is “Ascension (New York Becomes the Center of the Art World),” which spans eight feet and more than a century of art-related events and resembles a telephone

switchboard run amok. Everything seems to be here, cheek to jowl, from the founding of the National Academy of Design in 1825 to the opening of the “Sensation” exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 1999. Florine Stettheimer’s move in 1926 to 182 West 58th Street is jostled by Julian Schnabel’s current address while the adjacent (turquoise) plaque informs us of Max Beckmann’s death on Dec. 27, 1950, on West 69th Street near Central Park. Here, especially, Mr. Munk gives dizzying visual expression to some of what lures the art-driven to the city: the sense of possibility in the air and of history beneath our feet.



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